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# Security Council

Sixty-first year

*Provisional*

**5417**th meeting

Friday, 21 April 2006, 10.35 a.m.

New York

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| *President:* | Mr. Zhang Yishan | (China) |
| *Members:* | Argentina | Mr. Mayoral |
| | Congo | Mr. Gayama |
| | Denmark | Mr. Faaborg-Andersen |
| | France | Mr. De La Sablière |
| | Ghana | Nana Effah-Apenteng |
| | Greece | Mr. Vassilakis |
| | Japan | Mr. Oshima |
| | Peru | Mr. Ruiz Rosas |
| | Qatar | Mr. Al-Bader |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Dolgov |
| | Slovakia | Mr. Burian |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir Emyr Jones Parry |
| | United Republic of Tanzania | Mr. Mahiga |
| | United States of America | Ms. Sanders |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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06-31892 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East**

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister of Lebanon. I request the Deputy Chief of Protocol to escort the Prime Minister to his seat at the Council table.

*Mr. Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister of Lebanon, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.*

*At the invitation of the President, Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) took the seat reserved for him at the Council table.*

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, at this meeting.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fouad Siniora, Prime Minister of Lebanon.

**Mr. Siniora** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your invitation to address the members of the Security Council. I would also like to take this opportunity to express Lebanon's thanks to the Security Council for all the support it has provided in enhancing Lebanon's sovereignty and prosperity. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts and positive and constructive role for Lebanon on the various aspects of the issue.

(*spoke in English*)

It gives me great pleasure to address the Council today, first, to update it on recent developments in Lebanon and, secondly, to share our thoughts on a number of issues of common interest and concern.

But let me first express our deep gratitude for the great support that the United Nations including, especially, the Secretary-General and the Security Council, has provided to Lebanon over the past 19 months. This support has been instrumental in helping Lebanon move along in its transition towards the achievement of its territorial integrity, full independence and sovereignty and, most important, in reaching those results by peaceful means. United Nations support has not only been important for Lebanon, but it has also meant a great deal for the region, as the achievement of peace and security in Lebanon contributes to peace and security in the Middle East. The positive role of the United Nations is also important because it demonstrates that international institutions can be effective in protecting the legitimate rights of small countries and in making it possible for them to achieve those rights through peaceful means.

Today's meeting is timely as it comes after the preparation of the third report of the Secretary-General on Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and before the Council convenes to discuss that report. In this connection, I would like to commend the Secretary-General and his special representative, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, and to thank them for an objective and accurate report.

The great historic transition that the Lebanese people started a year ago is not yet complete. There are certainly a number of serious challenges before us. But let me start with what I believe are important strides that have already been made on the road towards the Lebanon that we want: a self-governing, stable, democratic, moderate and more prosperous country.

After many years of civil strife, Israeli occupation and Syrian presence, during which most major policy issues were being either managed by non-Lebanese or were in some cases considered taboo or too sensitive to tackle, the Lebanese started to engage in real and

serious debate over all policy matters. The conference of national dialogue, which was initiated last March, was a clear expression of the readiness of the Lebanese to address difficult national issues in a serious and peaceful manner.

This process of national dialogue, which brings together 14 representatives of all the parliamentary blocs, has already achieved significant progress. Consensus has been reached on important matters such as relations with Syria, the delimitation of all common borders between Lebanon and Syria, including, first and foremost, the Sheba'a farms area, the policy towards the Palestinians in Lebanon and the international investigation and judicial process relating to the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri and his companions. The significance of reaching an agreement on those issues should not be underestimated.

The Lebanese people have shown remarkable resilience in the face of a systematic attempt to terrorize and intimidate them by means of bombings and the assassination of a number of pro-independence political figures and media personalities. This collective resilience has demonstrated that the Lebanese people have indeed moved a long way towards a strong, united and stable country — a country that cannot be easily fractured or intimidated.

It is a major challenge to put Lebanese-Syrian relations on the right footing. The scars left by the dramatic developments of the past 19 months and by the heavy-handed interference in Lebanese domestic affairs by the Syrian security establishment for many years are not easy to heal. However, for the sake of fairness, we should admit that Syria, for a significant part of the past 30 years, played a very important and constructive role in ending attempts to partition Lebanon and in helping Lebanon achieve the withdrawal of Israeli forces from most of southern Lebanon in the year 2000. In the national dialogue it has been unanimously agreed that the relations between the two sister countries should be strong and positive and based on mutual respect, parity and non-interference, and I personally strongly believe in that.

Such relations require, first and foremost, an effort to re-establish confidence between the two countries, genuine acceptance by the Syrian Government of a truly independent Lebanon and a genuine recognition that a free and sovereign Lebanon can have good relations with Syria and can serve Syrian and Arab interests better. That is a challenge. In our view, a positive response by Syria with regard to the steps agreed by all the parties in the national dialogue — including the establishment of diplomatic relations and the delineation of the borders between the two countries, including in the Sheba'a farms area — will be an indication that the Syrian Government is beginning to accept the idea that good relations between Syria and an independent Lebanon are possible. However long it takes, good relations between Lebanon and Syria, based on mutual respect, will be achieved and have to be achieved, because that is in the interests of both countries.

Since 1978, Lebanon has suffered from the Israeli occupation of large parts of its territory and from several other invasions and aggressions, which have all resulted in major destruction and dislocation. In May of 2000, Israeli forces withdrew from most of the occupied territories, with the exception of an area bordering Syria's Golan Heights, which is referred to as the Sheba'a farms. For us, the liberation of this still-occupied Lebanese land is a priority national issue. It is incumbent upon Israel to withdraw from that land, to hand over the Lebanese detainees in its prisons, to submit the maps of the landmines it left in the south and to stop its infringements on Lebanese sovereignty. We look forward to an active United Nations role in helping us to achieve those rightful demands.

The delineation of the Lebanese Sheba'a farms area — which Israel has continued to occupy, even after its withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 — is important in that context, because it has major implications for our ability to liberate that area. Agreeing with Syria on the border line that separates the Sheba'a farms from the Syrian Golan Heights will be an important step towards achieving the full withdrawal of the Israelis from Lebanon to the internationally recognized borders, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). The Syrian Government has already declared verbally that the Sheba'a farms region is part of Lebanese territory. Also, and as indicated in the Secretary-General's report, President Assad himself stated in June of 2001 that

> "according to international law, it is up to the bordering States concerned to identify the status of a territory. Once that discussion is completed, an accord must be registered with the

international authorities. In the case of Sheba'a, this is the strict responsibility of Syria and Lebanon".

Accordingly, and in line with the Lebanese consensus on this matter, we have approached the Syrian Government in order to delineate the border in that region. The two Governments will then deposit the border agreement with the United Nations, which will draw the appropriate conclusions. We are still awaiting a positive response from Syria. In any event, we will be requesting the Secretary-General to confirm the specific steps required by the United Nations to recognize Lebanese sovereignty over the territory of the Sheba'a farms.

Another Government priority is the implementation of policies towards the Palestinians in Lebanon through dialogue, as unanimously agreed by all the national dialogue parties. That includes discussions with the Palestinian side to end all the armed presence outside the refugee camps within six months and subsequently to address the issue of weapons and security within the camps — all in accordance with Lebanon's sovereignty and the State's obligation to provide security for everyone throughout its territory, in accordance with the Taif national reconciliation pact of 1989.

The Government has also initiated a major effort to improve the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which embodies the responsibility of the international community towards those refugees who were forced out of their country, Palestine, when Israel was established.

It is no secret that for many years Lebanon's relationship with the Palestinian refugees on its territory has been difficult; in certain periods, it has been one of armed conflict. It is also a fact that the difficult living conditions in the refugee camps have allowed the camps to become breeding grounds and a safe haven for various armed factions. We intend to do our utmost, in association with the international community and donor countries, to help change the living conditions in the refugee camps. We have started discussions with the Palestinians to address economic and humanitarian needs, in addition to the issues of arms and security. In the period ahead, we intend to press forward on all those issues, especially with donor countries with a view to providing the necessary aid through UNRWA to improve the conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon until a final solution is reached for them in the context of the peace process and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab peace initiative.

In addition to implementing decisions already taken by the National Dialogue Conference, another challenge is to reach agreement on two remaining issues that have yet to be addressed. The first is the issue of the presidency of the Republic. Currently, the majority in parliament considers the extension of President Lahoud's term in September 2004 for three more years to have been the result of interference and coercion by Syria — which had great influence over the Lebanese parliament at that time — against all of the advice discouraging such heavy-handed interference. Because the majority in parliament is not sufficient to constitutionally shorten President Lahoud's extended term, thus paving the way for the election of a new President, the issue has been referred to the national dialogue in the hope that consensus can be reached. That has proved difficult so far. The national dialogue will convene on 28 April to take up the issue again. Agreement on the matter remains a challenge.

Another issue which will be taken up when the national dialogue is resumed is Hizbollah's weapons and their role in the defence of Lebanon. While there is consensus throughout Lebanon on the important role that the resistance, spearheaded by Hizbollah, played in forcing Israel's withdrawal from the south in May 2000, as well as on the fact that the south-eastern corner of the country, namely the Sheba'a farms, remains occupied, the future role of Hizbollah's weapons in defending Lebanon is a matter of national debate. That debate will be carried out in the context of a strategy agreed upon by all Lebanese concerning how best to defend Lebanon, against the backdrop of the provisions of the Taif Agreement of 1989, United Nations resolutions regarding Lebanon and the continued occupation of the Sheba'a farms, as well as the long history of incursions and violations of Lebanese territory by Israel. Reconciling those considerations with the natural obligation of the State to be the sole provider of security to all its citizens and residents, and the right of the State to have a monopoly over arms and to exercise its full authority throughout

the country, is a major challenge to be addressed in the period ahead.

Today's meeting also takes place in the midst of our consultations with the United Nations on the formation of a tribunal of an international character to try those involved in the assassination of late Prime Minister Hariri and his companions. I would like here to express our deep appreciation for the professional work carried out by Mr. Serge Brammertz and the Investigation Commission, which we hope will succeed in identifying the perpetrators of that terrorist crime and bringing them to justice. This is important not only with regard to the Hariri assassination — which is a very important aspect — but also because Lebanon has suffered most in the region from political assassinations over the past two decades. Revealing the truth and serving justice on those found guilty will be a major deterrent to those who might in the future contemplate such heinous crimes in Lebanon or elsewhere. In order to ensure continuity in the investigation and help to bring it to a successful conclusion, we would strongly support an extension of Mr. Brammertz's term, which we view as necessary.

With regard to the setting up of a tribunal of an international character, I would like to thank the Security Council for putting this issue on the fast track — something to which we attach utmost importance. We stand ready to conclude our discussions with the legal team of the United Nations as soon as possible so as to make sure that there is a smooth transition from the investigation to the tribunal.

Our region is in turmoil. What happens in Lebanon has a significant impact on the whole region. As Lebanese, and also as part of the Arab and Muslim worlds, we have an interest in and a responsibility for working together against the forces of extremism and despair by addressing the reasons that lie behind them. We want to go back to the true principles of moderation and tolerance which characterized our region and the religions that emanated from it.

The international community also has an interest in and a responsibility for helping the peoples of the region to shake off their feelings of hopelessness and despair and for contributing to their efforts in building more democratic and prosperous societies. The increasingly widespread prejudice against Arabs and Muslims and the stereotyping of them as violent or inherently hostile to the West only feed into their pervasive sense of humiliation and anger — as does the failure of the international community to correct the great injustice done to the Palestinian people. This sense of grave injustice, spanning six decades, has undoubtedly contributed to the feeling of helplessness and humiliation in the Arab and Muslim worlds. It has also provided fertile ground for extremist and violent minds to engage — in the name of religion — in activities against innocent people that contradict the principles of all religions. Moreover, Israel continues to reject the Arab peace initiative, thus maintaining the instability in the region and throughout the Muslim world.

If we could all cooperate and mobilize our joint efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as with the other Arab countries, we would be contributing to the cause of democracy and peace in the Arab and Muslim worlds. That should be a priority objective of the international community. A great deal is at stake. The Council's responsibilities, and ours, are great. Lebanon is staying the course. We hope that, together, we will all succeed.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Atieh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President, for having given me this opportunity to address the Council regarding the situation in the Middle East. I would like to welcome the Secretary-General, who is present at this meeting. I would also like to welcome the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Fouad Siniora, who has just made a statement about the situation in Lebanon.

My delegation asked to participate in and speak at this meeting so that it could explain the position of Syria on some of the points just raised by the Prime Minister of Lebanon. In this context, we would like to reaffirm the special relationship between our two countries and our two peoples — the Syrian and the Lebanese peoples — as dictated by history and geography. No external factor can separate them. In this respect, we regret the attempt by certain parties in the Lebanese arena to undermine that relationship in one way or another by spreading rumours that there is tension between our two fraternal countries. Syria has helped to promote stability and to put an end to the devastating civil war in Lebanon.

Syria has also sacrificed many of its sons to ensure Lebanon's freedom and independence and to put an end to Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. During his statement, the Prime Minister of Lebanon spoke about Syria's constructive and important role in putting an end to attempts to divide Lebanon and to build national unity.

I now refer to the question of the demarcation of the border between Syria and Lebanon. We believe that, contrary to what some have implied, there is no problem in this regard. However, Syria has stated that it is willing to demarcate the border. Syria's Prime Minister has sent a letter in that regard to his Lebanese counterpart.

Concerning the demarcation of the border in the Sheba'a farms area, that region is under Israeli occupation. Israel must withdraw from the occupied lands before our two countries can demarcate their border, because demarcating the border there can only take place once the Sheba'a area is free of foreign occupation.

As to the issue of diplomatic representation between our two countries, since 1990 the agreements and existing institutions linking the two countries have gone far beyond the issue of exchanging ambassadors. Syria reaffirms its respect for the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. The question of the exchange of ambassadors is a sovereign one. However, if there is a mutual desire to renew diplomatic relations, that matter can be considered.

Syria affirms its support for the national dialogue in Lebanon between our Lebanese brothers. We hope that dialogue will be successful, for that would be to the benefit of the Lebanese people. We believe that all the questions to be discussed by the Lebanese people should be left to the political parties in Lebanon, so that they may reach agreement without external interference.

Syria implemented the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004) pertaining to it when it withdrew all its troops and personnel from Lebanon on 26 April 2005. Some parties have said that the issues of the demarcation of the borders and the exchange of ambassadors are part of resolution 1559 (2004). However, we reject that idea. We believe that the matters of exchanging ambassadors and demarcating the border are sovereign matters for Lebanon and Syria. The Security Council should not interfere in those matters, in accordance with Article 2, paragraph 7, of the Charter, which states that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state".

The Arab region aspires to comprehensive and lasting peace, as well as to the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Peace in the Middle East will come about through Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied Arab territories in the Syrian Golan and the Sheba'a farms in Lebanon and from occupied Palestinian territories to the 4 June 1967 line.

Some States have taken advantage of their membership in the Security Council to achieve certain objectives. That is contrary to the goal of peace and security in the region and will contribute to instability and tension. We hope that the Council members will demonstrate the same enthusiasm when it comes to implementing resolutions pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as it does with regard to other resolutions.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to a private meeting to continue our discussion of the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.*